

## CASE REPORT

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### Entrapment of a Cat in a New-Style Pet Food Container

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**ABSTRACT:** Although many regulations exist to protect human consumers from hazardous products, there are no comparable safeguards for products intended for pet use. The authors describe a case in which a new-style cat food container presented a hazard to pets.

**KEYWORDS:** pathology and biology, veterinary medicine, asphyxia, product safety, veterinary forensic pathology

Although there are many reports of human deaths by asphyxia in the literature, there are few reports of animal deaths due to positional or mechanical asphyxia. The purpose of this case report is to describe the pertinent findings of a case involving entrapment of a cat in a "new and improved" style of cat food can.

#### Case Report

Toby, a 14-month-old long-haired male cat of mixed breed, had not been seen for about 12 h when his 11-year-old owner and her father, a physician, began looking for him near their house and farm buildings. After searching for about 30 min, the owner remembered that the cat had previously been trapped inside a trash dumpster and she looked inside. Toby's motionless body was seen, with his head entrapped in a 13-oz (370-g) cat food can (Fig. 1). He was quickly retrieved and was noted to have shallow, labored respiration and a very rapid heartbeat. He was taken into a nearby garage, where the can was carefully cut away with aviation-style tin snips. After being extricated, he was somewhat obtunded, but responded rapidly to warming, through being wrapped in a towel, and oral hydration. He is without sequelae 24 months later.

The can in which Toby was trapped was a new-style, pull-tab, "easy open" 13-oz (370-g) can (Fig. 1).<sup>3</sup> This new style of can has a 0.16 in. (4.1 mm) rim around the opening

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<sup>3</sup>All measurements were made using a vernier caliper, calibrated to read in both inches and millimetres.

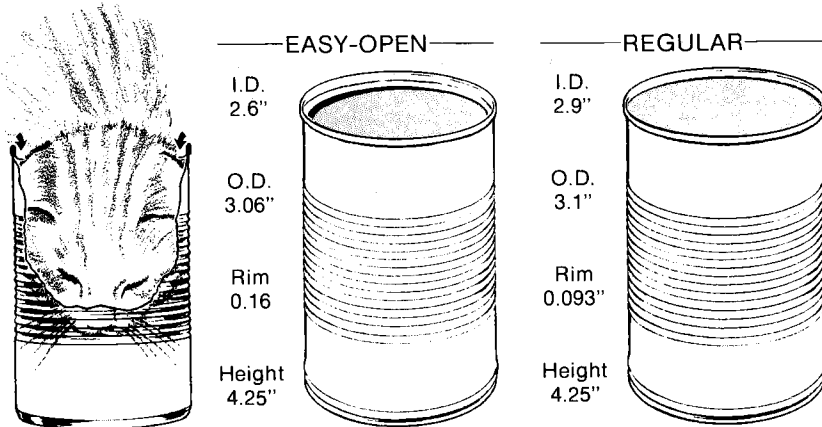


FIG. 1—(Left) A cutaway view showing entrapment of the cat's head through being caught on the rim of an "easy open" cat food can; the rim is indicated by arrows. (Middle and right) The dimensions and designs of the "easy open" and "regular" style cans, respectively: I.D. = inside diameter; O.D. = outside diameter (illustration by George Buckley). Metric equivalents for the easy-open can dimensions: I.D. = 66 mm; O.D. = 78 mm; rim = 4.1 mm; height = 108 mm. Metric equivalents for the regular can dimensions: I.D. = 74 mm; O.D. = 79 mm; rim = 2.4 mm; height = 108 mm.

to accommodate the pull top, whereas the old style or "regular" type of can, which requires a can opener, has a rim of 0.93 in. (2.36 mm). The newer style of can has an inside diameter 0.3 in. (7.6 mm) smaller than the older style of can. This wider rim can trap an animal's head inside the can by catching its ears on the rim, as is illustrated in Fig. 1.

Correspondence with the pet food manufacturer about the problem yielded the response that this particular can style had been discontinued. A subsequent letter inquiring about the reason or reasons for this decision was not answered by the manufacturer. Another manufacturer has very recently reintroduced a pull-tab, "easy open" catfood can, but the dimensions are smaller than those of the previous, hazardous version. Specifically, the outside diameter of the can is 2.90 in. (74 mm), and the inside diameter of the can is 2.43 in. (62 mm). This can has a 0.23-in. (6-mm) rim to accommodate the pull top. Whether or not this can, with its reduced inside diameter, will prove less hazardous remains to be seen. In both cases, the hazard is eliminated if the soft aluminum can is crushed prior to disposal, but this simple suggestion does not appear on the label.

## Discussion

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission closely monitors products designed for human use and even maintains a "hot line" for medical examiners to report products that may have contributed to human deaths. To our knowledge, there is no comparable agency or service for hazardous pet products. This particular case represents another instance in which an "improved" product may introduce an unanticipated consumer hazard.

Death from any form of asphyxia may present a diagnostic problem for human and veterinary pathologists. The cardinal signs of asphyxia are nonspecific and subtle, and at autopsy, the only findings may be visceral congestion and petechiae of the thoracic viscera. In addition, increased fluidity of the blood may sometimes be seen [1]. In humans, traumatic asphyxia has been reported in one series as being seen most commonly in people ejected from and pinned under motor vehicles, in victims working under inade-

quately supported cars which fell on them, and in children under the age of five who were crushed under furniture [2].

In the cat, true laryngospasm often leads to choking and asphyxiation. This is commonly associated with laryngeal manipulation under too light a plane of surgical anesthesia, since the dome-shaped feline larynx and the ventricular muscles contribute to complete glottic closure [3]. Other, less common causes of mechanical airway obstruction in the cat are foreign bodies and pathologic tracheal obstruction. Pathologic causes of tracheal obstruction include laryngeal paralysis, neoplasia of the larynx, thyroid and parathyroid neoplasms, and enlargement of mandibular and retropharyngeal lymph nodes. Mediastinal masses, thymomas, and esophageal tumors may also compress the trachea. To our knowledge, this is the first case report of its type in the literature.

### References

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